



Atkai

# The White Dove



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A FAIRY-TALE FROM DAGHESTAN

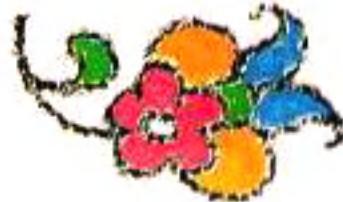
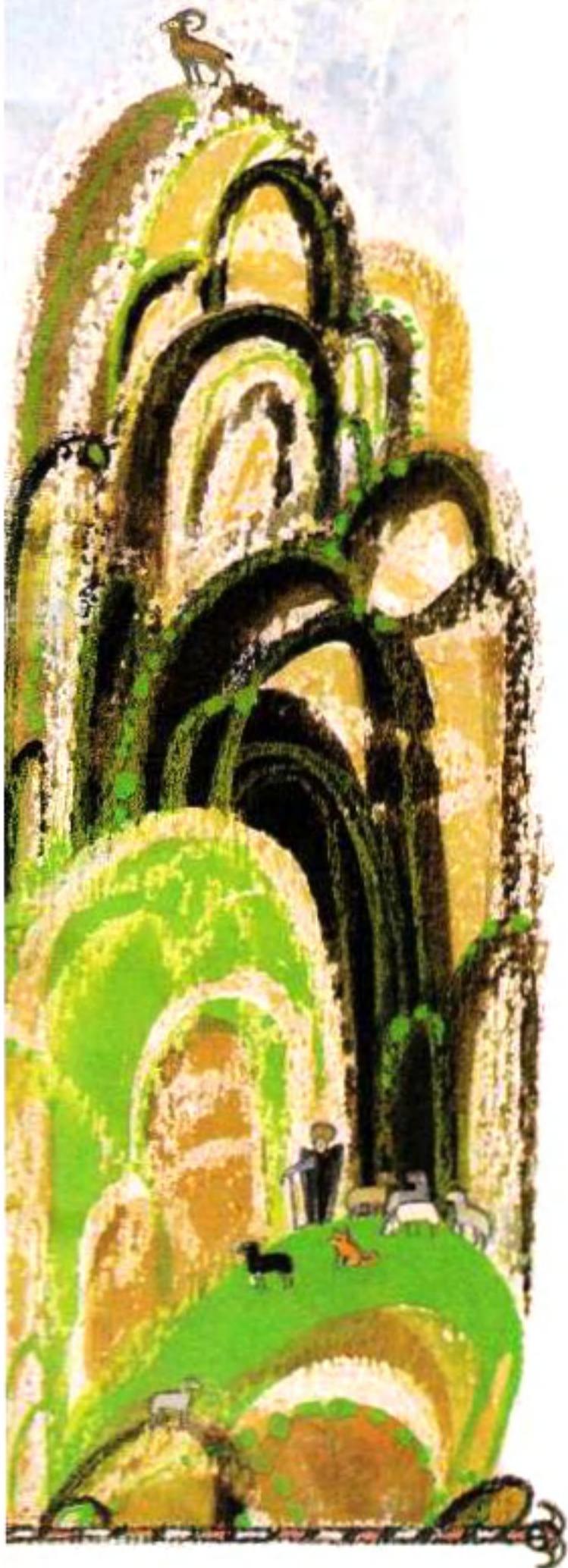


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VERA KHLEBNIKOVA



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In a mountain village, far to go,  
A woman lived not long ago.  
She carried water from door to door,  
Her children filled her hut—what's more  
She loved them one and all the same.  
Nana was that good woman's name.

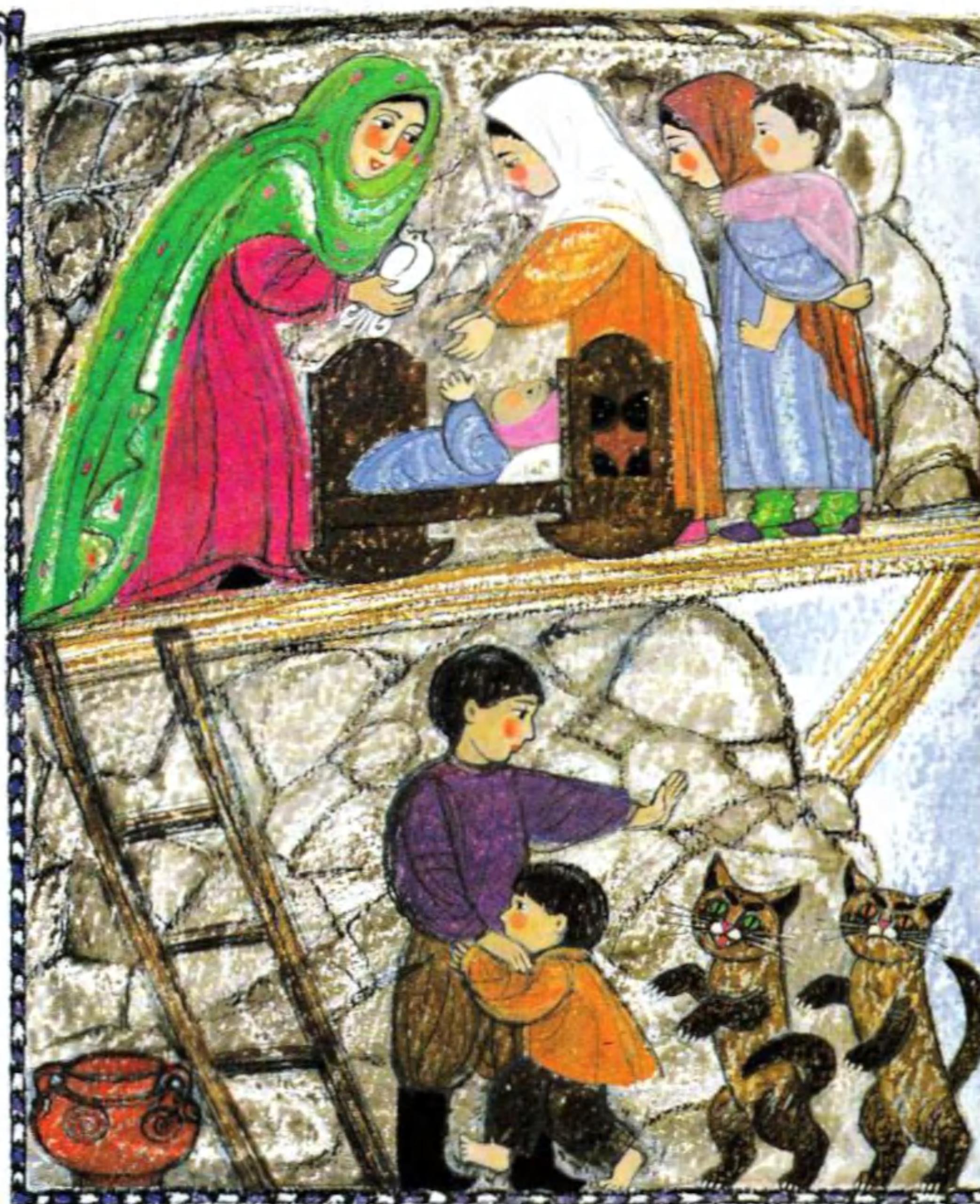
A lover of scandal lived there too —  
No lover of children she, it's true.  
To neighbours just for gossip she came.  
Johanne was that bad woman's name.

But let us leave them for a spell,  
And tell about a dove as well.  
This bird had hurt its little leg,  
Which hung as useless as a peg.  
Beside the stream it limped around.  
Nana soon saw her on the ground.  
Forgetting her other troubles there,  
She took her up with tender care,





And quickly brought her home and bound  
Her leg with clean cloth round and round.  
She tied the injured part up well,  
And soon the wound began to heal.  
The children ran in, with delight  
They saw the dove all milky white.  
They gave her water, crumbs of bread,  
And kissed her little beak and head.



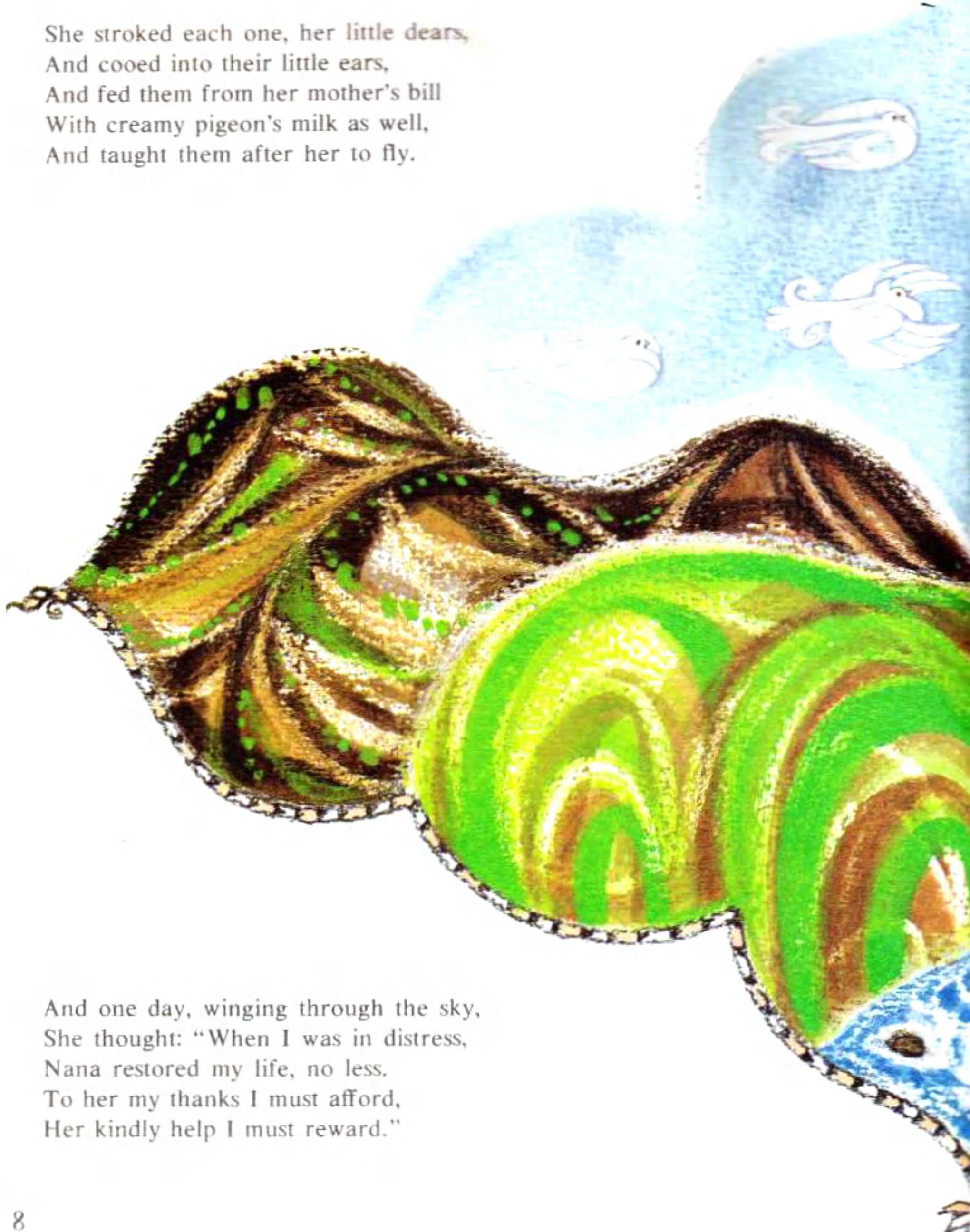


With joy each child began to call,  
Especially one, more bold than all,  
Who shouted the news to all around,  
About the dove Nana had found.  
Johanne, of course, soon heard the news,  
Came hurrying in, no time to lose.  
Straightway she said: "Nana my love,  
I beg you, sell me that white dove!  
I'm dying for a pigeon pie —  
I'll pay your price, however high!"

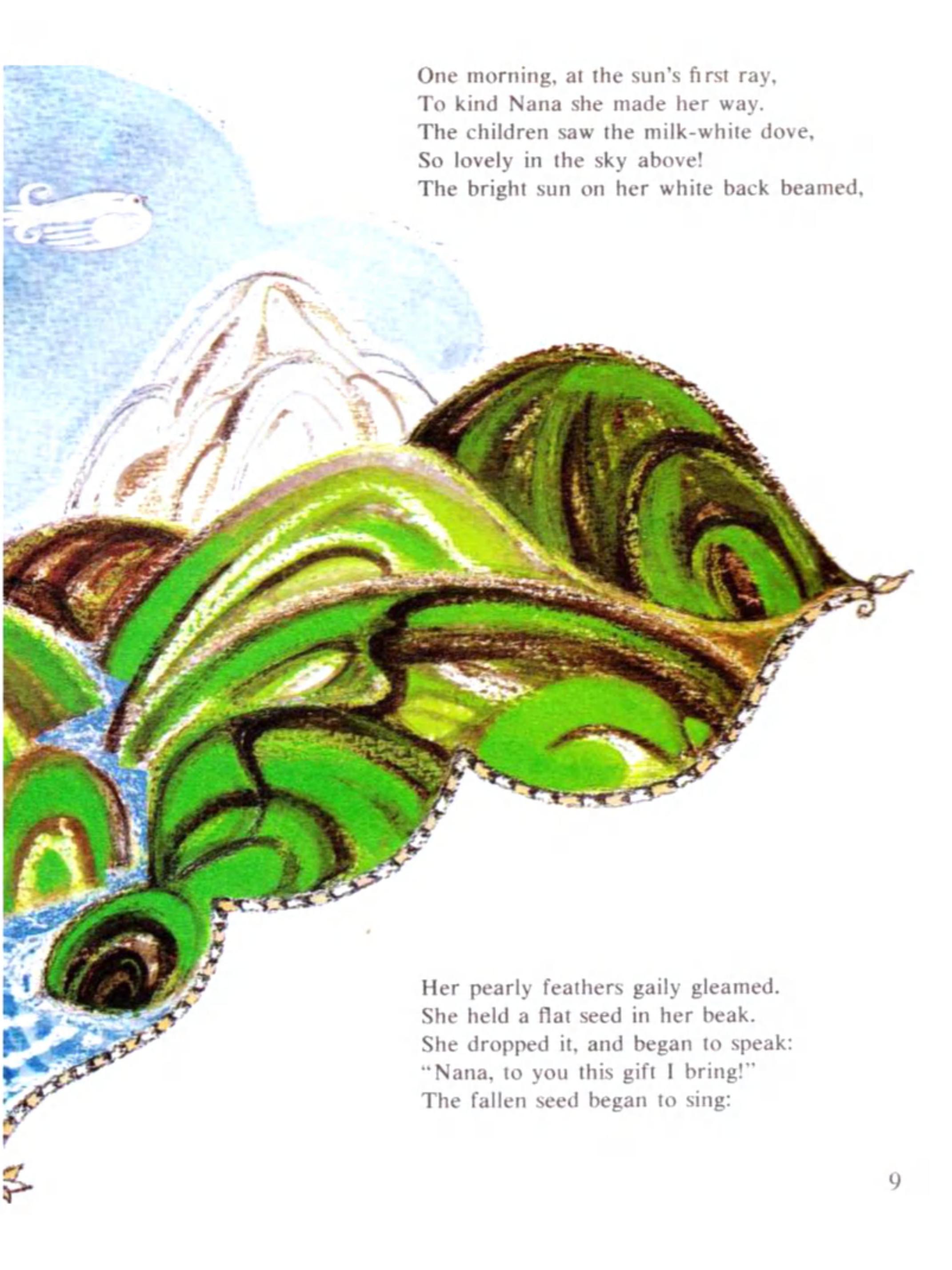
The children stared at her askance.  
Nana replied, with cutting glance:  
"But it's a milk-white dove, and tame!  
The children's pet! Shame on you, shame!  
She probably has young at home,  
Like me, with little ones of my own.  
I won't sell her for you to kill,  
So keep your dirty money still!"

Johanne went off in quite a huff,  
And couldn't pity herself enough.  
A night went past, and by next day  
The dove's leg healed — she flew away,  
Beating her wings, with happy breast,  
Back to her fledglings in their nest.  
And when she found them safe and sound,  
Her happiness then knew no bound.

She stroked each one, her little dears,  
And cooed into their little ears,  
And fed them from her mother's bill  
With creamy pigeon's milk as well,  
And taught them after her to fly.

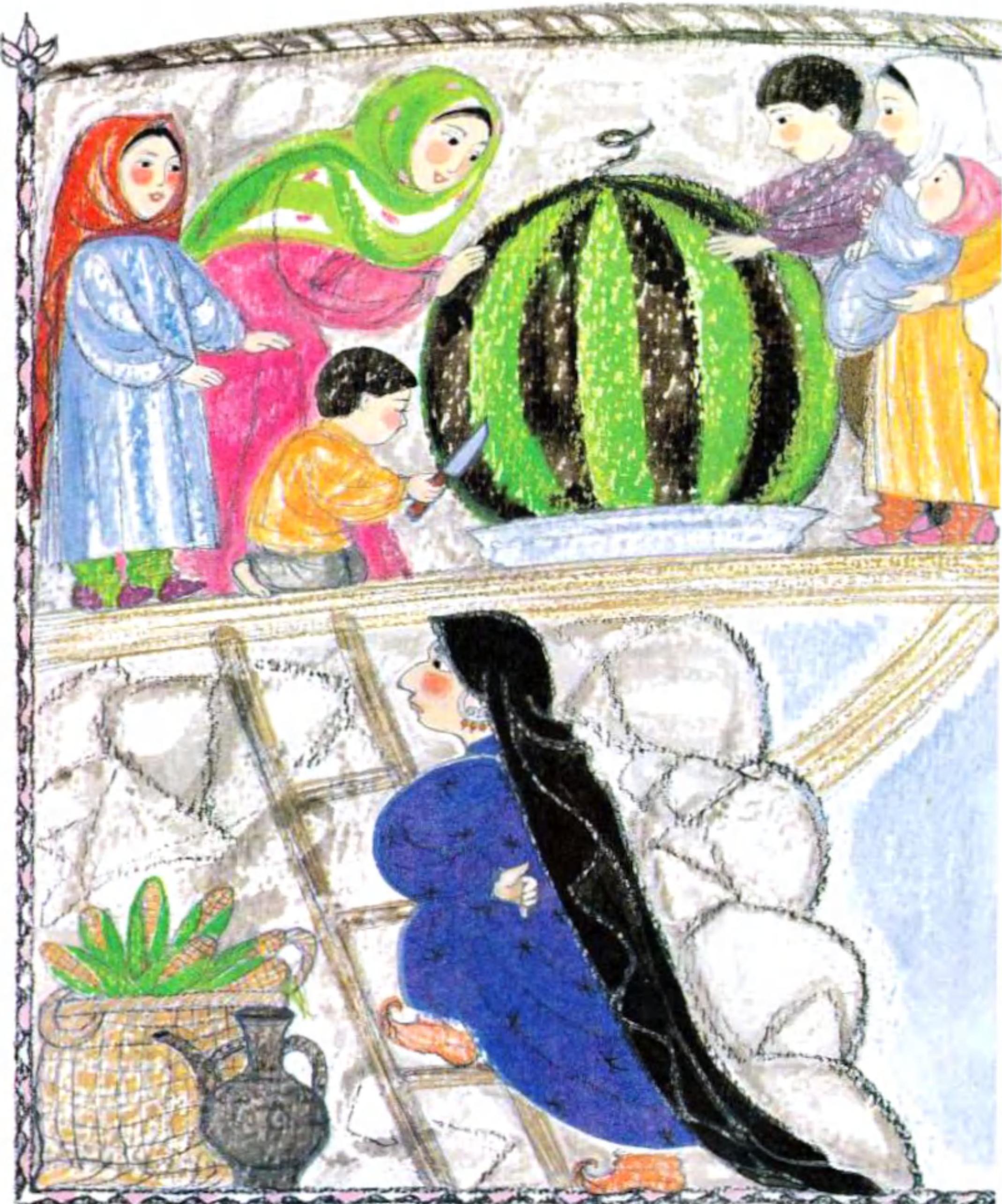


And one day, winging through the sky,  
She thought: "When I was in distress,  
Nana restored my life, no less.  
To her my thanks I must afford,  
Her kindly help I must reward."



One morning, at the sun's first ray,  
To kind Nana she made her way.  
The children saw the milk-white dove,  
So lovely in the sky above!  
The bright sun on her white back beamed,

Her pearly feathers gaily gleamed.  
She held a flat seed in her beak.  
She dropped it, and began to speak:  
"Nana, to you this gift I bring!"  
The fallen seed began to sing:



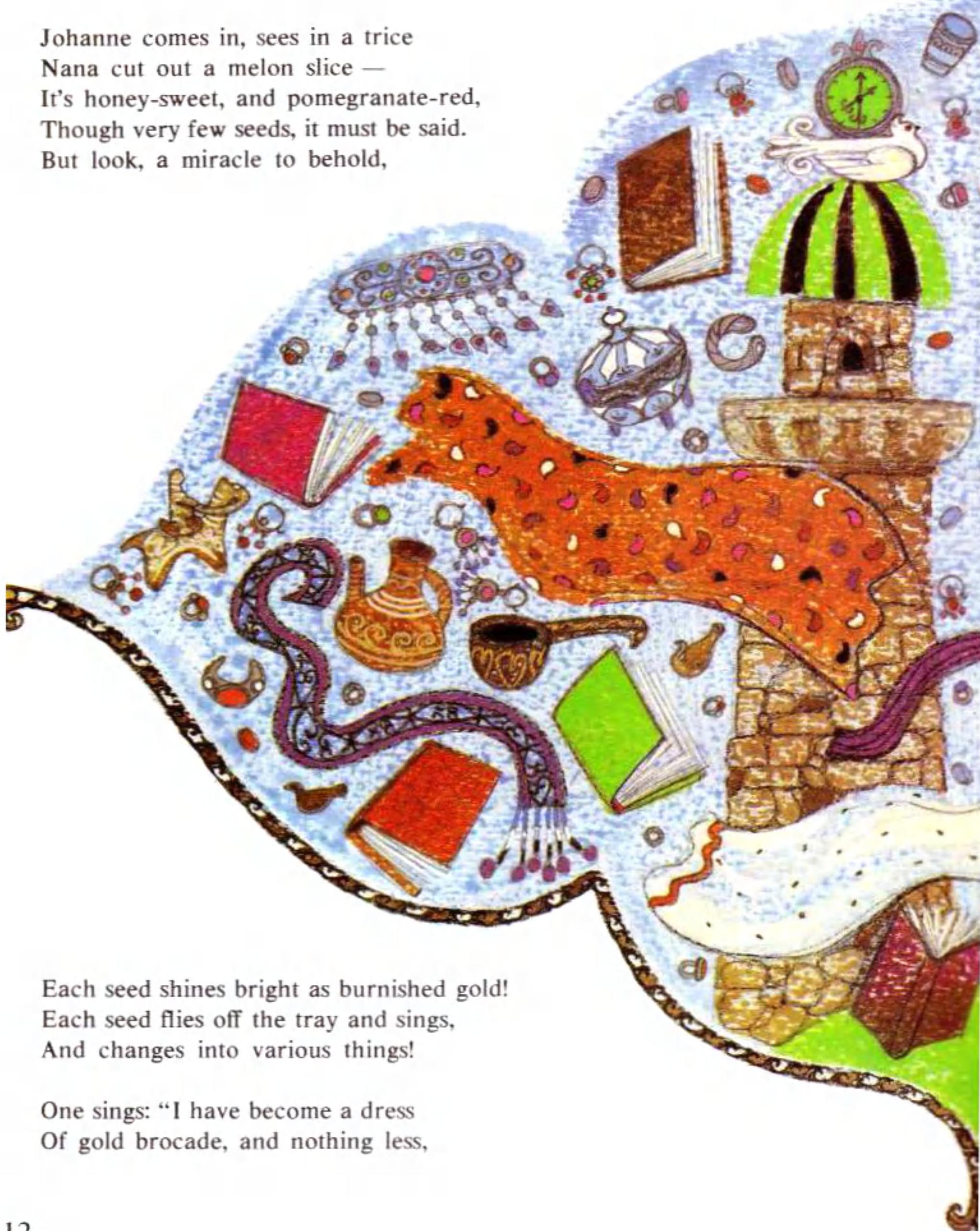


“I’m not a pumpkin seed, oh no!  
I’m not a seed of sturgeon’s roe.  
I am a seed of frozen snow.  
Green outside, red within I’ll grow!”

What a happy noise the children made!  
They said: “We’ll take a hoe and spade,  
We’ll dig the patch of ground we need,  
And there we’ll plant the snowflake seed!”

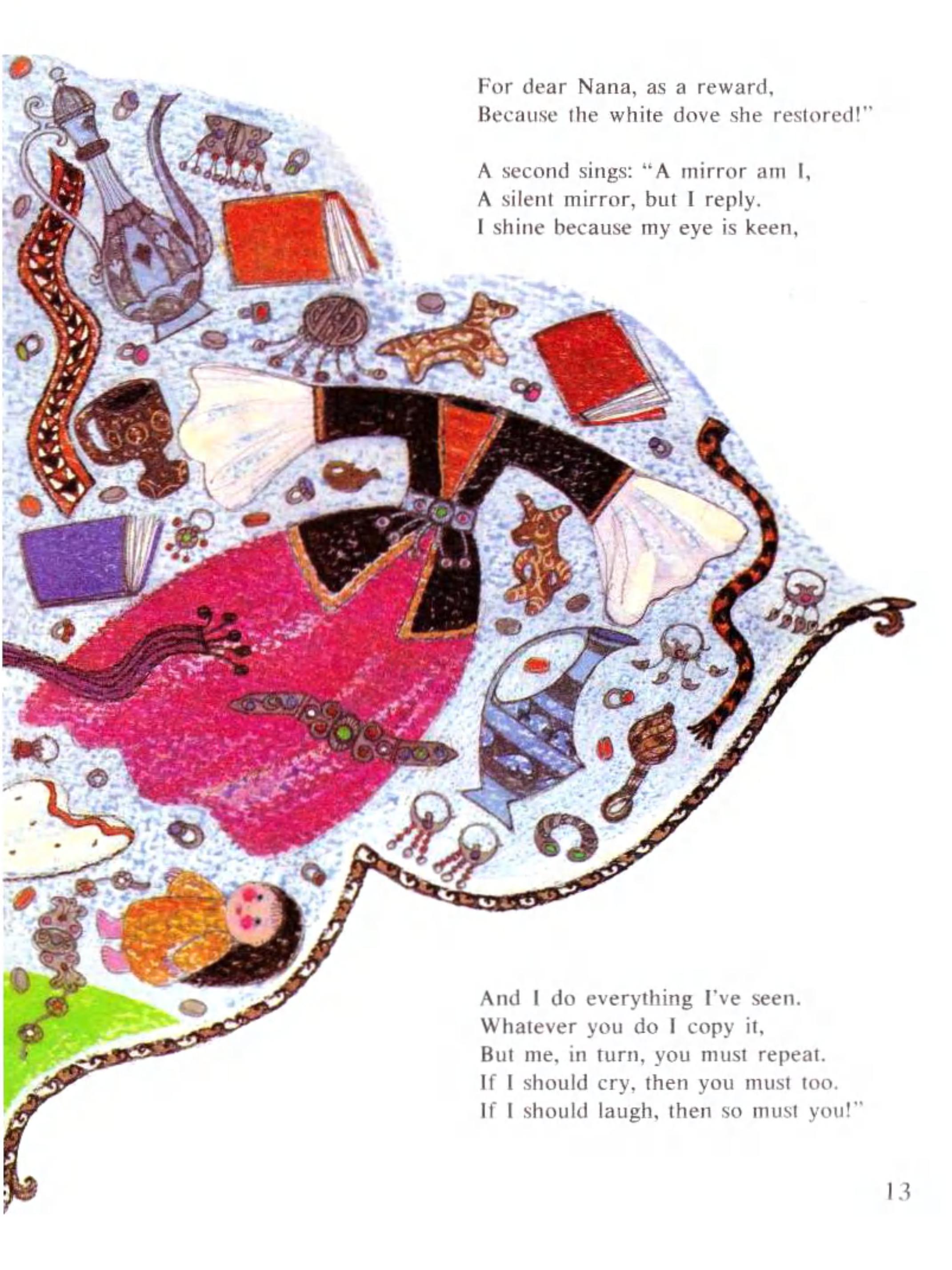
So, in a corner of their court,  
The seed which the white dove had brought  
Nana herself then planted there,  
And they all tended it with care.  
And soon the seed sent forth its leaves.  
They grew so high, hung down like eaves,  
All interwoven, fresh and green,  
Has ever such a wonder been?  
Although the blooms were many, yet  
On one alone a melon set!  
A melon striped in black and green,  
As big as the biggest barrel you’ve seen!  
That melon ripe and ready grew,  
Nana’s sharp knife the stalk cut through,  
She placed it on a wooden tray,  
The children round sang bright and gay:  
“Our dappled melon, black and green,  
Four arms around, and you between.  
Are you quite ripe and honey-sweet?  
We’ll cut you, taste you, what a treat!”

Johanne comes in, sees in a trice  
Nana cut out a melon slice —  
It's honey-sweet, and pomegranate-red,  
Though very few seeds, it must be said.  
But look, a miracle to behold,



Each seed shines bright as burnished gold!  
Each seed flies off the tray and sings,  
And changes into various things!

One sings: "I have become a dress  
Of gold brocade, and nothing less,



For dear Nana, as a reward,  
Because the white dove she restored!"

A second sings: "A mirror am I,  
A silent mirror, but I reply.  
I shine because my eye is keen,

And I do everything I've seen.  
Whatever you do I copy it,  
But me, in turn, you must repeat.  
If I should cry, then you must too.  
If I should laugh, then so must you!"

A third sang: "I'm for young and old,  
A row of beads, but hard and cold.  
Who in a warm hand me will hold,  
To her my secret will be told!"

Johanne snatched swiftly at the beads.  
"Give them to me!" she greedily pleads.  
"I am your neighbour. It's my due!  
Let me be one of the family too!"  
The fourth sang: "I'm a silken shawl!"  
The fifth: "I'm a dresser, straight and tall!"  
The sixth: "And I'm a doll that sings!"  
The seventh: "And I'm a horse with wings!  
Already man has learnt to fly —  
If he can do so, why not I?"

The eighth became a flowery field,  
The ninth a model palace revealed,  
The tenth — a tower, where up above  
There sat a little silver dove.  
Beneath, a clock chimed in the tower,  
And marked the passing of each hour.  
This toy was for the children done,  
For clever little heads, each one!  
"Ding, ding," the chimes ring through the hours,  
"May children flourish, gardens, flowers,  
May there be peace for evermore,  
And never again the flames of war!"





Ding-ding, ding-ding, ding-ding, ding-dong!"  
The children joined this happy song.  
They gazed wide-eyed in great delight,  
And palace, tower, and meadow bright,  
The clock and little silver dove  
Placed safely on a shelf above.

Johanne's eyes gleamed with envy then,  
From jealousy she grew quite thin.

The spring came round again when due,  
And into geese the goslings grew,  
The children also gained in height,  
And studied well, with all their might.  
Again we leave them for a spell,  
And tell about the dove as well.  
One day it flew back to the mead,  
And settled on the ground to feed.  
Johanne, with greedy-gleaming eyes,  
Seizes a stick, and straightway shies,  
With sweeping arm lets fly—and crack!  
She breaks the poor dove's leg, alack!  
And then a silken scarf she finds,  
With which the broken limb she binds.  
She has a plan, a sly one that!  
Another blow drives off her cat,  
And its green eyes, offended, burn,  
As off it flies, not to return.

A whole month slowly came to an end,  
Before the wounded leg would mend.  
A whole month long, and every day  
Johanne talked to herself this way:  
"Now, if the white dove, as before,  
Gives me as well a seed to sow,  
I'll plant it, water it o'er and o'er,



And soon a melon's bound to grow.  
Perhaps it will take back once more  
Nana's rich gifts, and then bestow  
Each one of them on me, ho ho!  
And won't those children feel sore,  
For their Nana I shall outdo,  
Right under their very noses too!  
And I shall crush that clock on the floor,  
That chimes, 'More children, no more war!'

Their precious toys to bits I'll hew,  
The doll's head from its neck I'll screw!"

Johanne, with such intentions sly,  
Let out the dove at last, to fly.  
She flapped her wings, and soared o'erhead,  
And straight back to her fledglings sped.



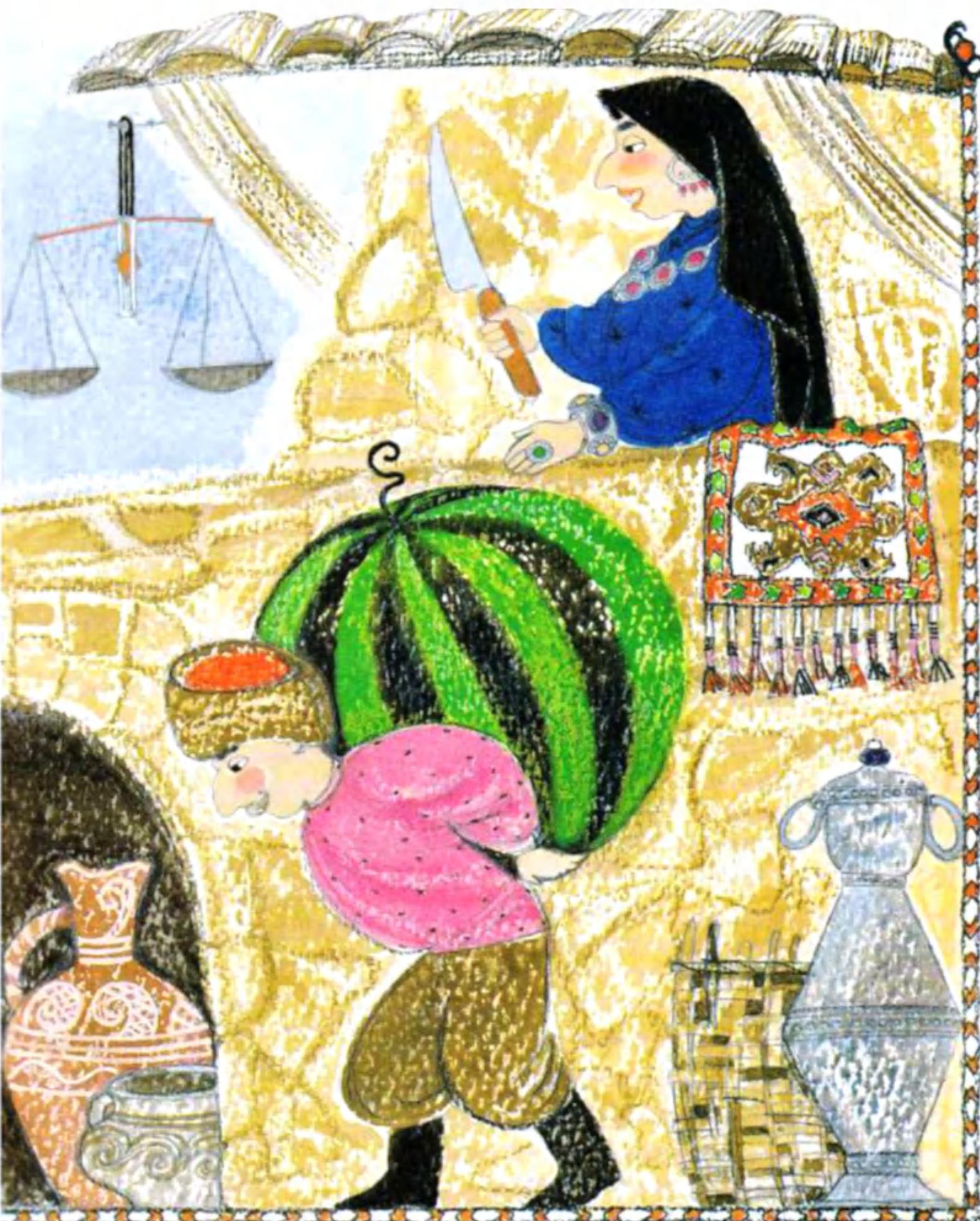
But having waited, called and cried,  
From hunger every one had died.  
She had to lay new eggs again,  
And, as she sat them, thought with pain:  
"How shall I cruel Johanne repay,  
Who brought such grief in my glad day,  
Hurt me, and caused my chicks to die?  
Her evil deeds I can't pass by!"

One morning, at the sun's first ray,  
To cruel Johanne she made her way.  
That ugly hag soon saw the dove  
So lovely in the sky above!  
The bright sun on her white back beamed,  
Her pearly feathers gaily gleamed,  
She held a flat seed in her beak.  
She dropped it, and began to speak:  
"Johanne, this gift I bring to you!"  
She cried: "At last! About time too!"  
And with these words the cruel Johanne  
Went off and called her serving-man:  
"Dig up a patch, clear every weed,  
Then in the corner sow this seed!"

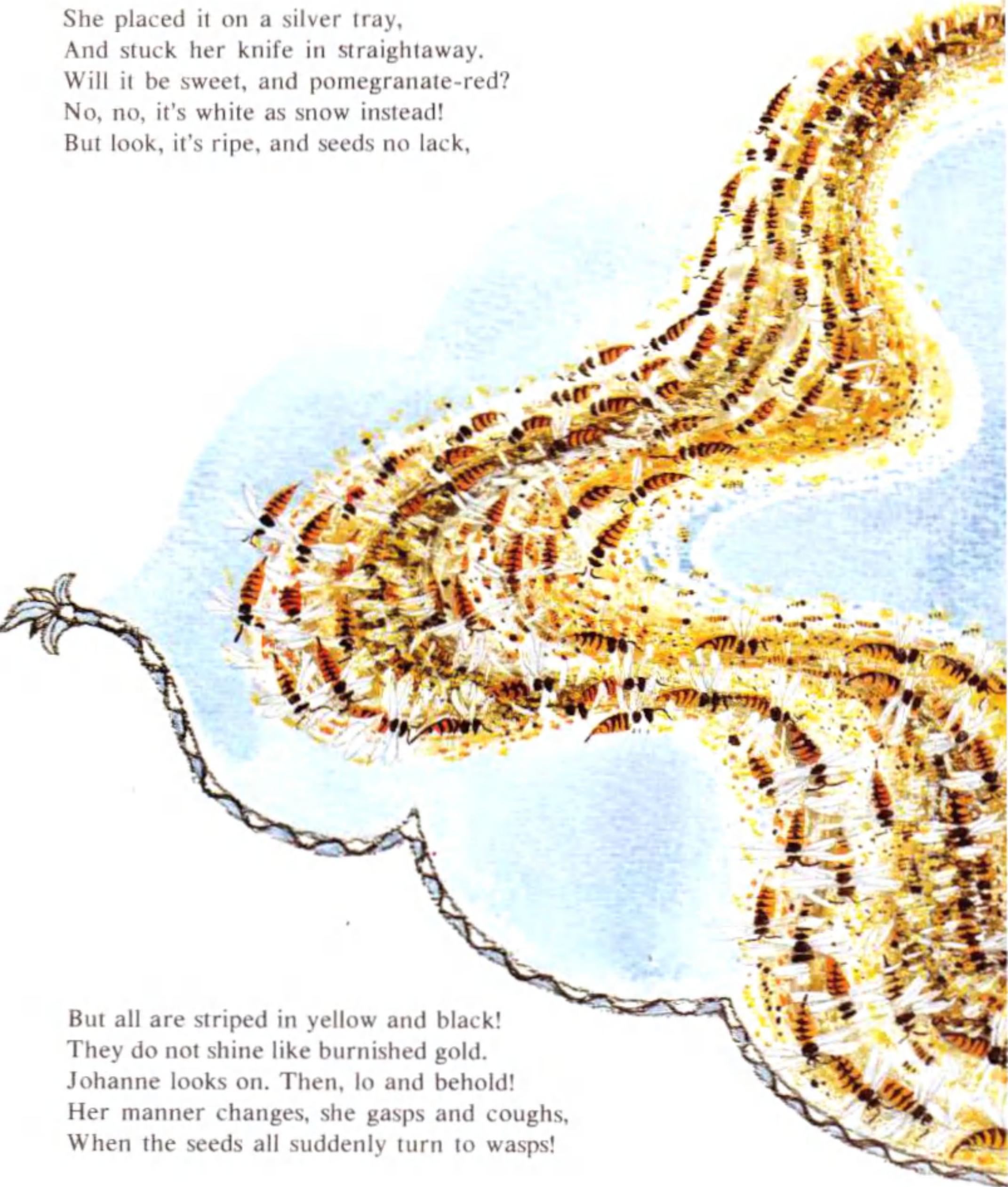
And soon the seed sent forth its leaves,  
They grew so high, hung down like eaves,  
All interwoven, fresh and green,  
Has ever such a wonder been?  
Although the blooms were many, yet  
On one alone a melon set,  
A melon striped in black and green,  
As big as the biggest barrel you've seen!

That melon ripe and ready grew,  
The man's sharp knife its stalk cut through,  
And to his wicked mistress' door,  
The melon in both arms he bore.





She placed it on a silver tray,  
And stuck her knife in straightaway.  
Will it be sweet, and pomegranate-red?  
No, no, it's white as snow instead!  
But look, it's ripe, and seeds no lack,



But all are striped in yellow and black!  
They do not shine like burnished gold.  
Johanne looks on. Then, lo and behold!  
Her manner changes, she gasps and coughs,  
When the seeds all suddenly turn to wasps!



Johanne's grim face goes grey, then white,  
As countless wasps came into sight,  
More than you ever saw or read,  
More than the hairs upon your head,  
More than the cherries on many a tree,  
More than the sand-grains by the sea!

Johanne among them starts to grope,  
And still does not give up all hope,  
But still she stupidly thinks with greed:  
"There must, as least, be *one* gold seed!"

The melon she begins to poke —  
The wasps come buzzing round her cloak.  
One gives her such a frightful sting,  
She grows as cross as anything!  
Then the whole swarm sting her at once,  
To neck and nose and chin they cling,  
A madly humming, buzzing bunch.  
Johanne waves wildly with each arm,



The wasps, still stinging, round her swarm.  
She loses her wits, just like a dunce,  
And dashed out in dire alarm.

The swarm of wasps behind her hums,  
She waves her arms, and runs and runs,  
She doesn't know which way to go,  
She cannot see, still struggling though,  
Around the mountains, and far from us,

To save herself she rushes thus.  
Her tom-cat chased her back through the meads,  
He caught her up, and clawed her beads  
Which hung in strings beneath her cloak.  
The slender thread which held them broke,  
And scattered on the earth they lay.  
A wild briar sprang up straight away!  
Its thorns caught hold of Johanne's dress,



And there she stopped in dire distress.  
She changed into a mouse, from fear,  
Which that great tom-cat did not spare!  
The children stood amazed near-by,  
As the tom-cat's tail rose straight and high.  
"I'm Tom the tabby, big and strong,  
My teeth, like nails, are sharp and long!  
An open door with my paw I close,  
A closed door open with my nose!"



## REQUEST TO READERS

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Translation from the Russian

Аткай

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